

Cables Wynd House: a story in pictures

✘ Photographer **Derek Anderson** and **Irvine Welsh's Simon 'Sick Boy' Williamson** have something in common: they both grew up in Leith's Banana Flats – or **Cables Wynd House** – one of the blocks of flats built by Edinburgh Borough Council (as it then was) in the 1960s as part of a plan to redevelop the area. In those days families keen to leave the slums moved eagerly into The Wynd; some of them are still there. Other residents have come and gone, replaced by new generations with new ideas. Every resident has a story, and now Derek has produced a fascinating exhibition of photographs he has taken as part of an HND in Photography at **Edinburgh College**. He aims to document the lives of people living in The Wynd today, to portray the reality of their everyday existence. He has worked with residents since December 2013; many of them have become friends.



In a neat and tidy sitting room, an older lady, her nails perfectly varnished, proudly displays her many tapestry pictures, . In an equally pristine room, a couple sit on an immaculate white sofa, the woman looking slightly apprehensive as the photo is taken. Another resident stands beside his polished fireplace; he is older now, but still has something of the fighter about him; his strong arms are generously tattooed. Family connections matter here: a lady in a wheelchair holds a photo of a young Royal Marine; grandchildren's art and school portraits cover the walls of many flats.

There is of course another side to this community; in an almost totally unfurnished room, a young man stares blankly through an uncurtained window. Food cartons. plastic bags and

medicine bottles litter the floor and the one table. We know neither his name nor his story, but the feeling of desolation speaks volumes. In another flat, an older man sits on the sofa in a well furnished room, his head down, his hands on his forehead.



The Wynd has its share of 'characters' too. A man lies on his bed with a gun in each hand; in a second photo he holds two rifles. Elsewhere a man in a combat jacket shows us some sort of sword. By contrast, in another flat a woman sits cross-legged on the floor, behind her a Buddhist shrine. The shelves are laden with books; suncatchers hang in the window. A middle-aged man stands in a smart room; flowers cover the table. He stares at the camera; he looks shocked.

A new generation is coming to The Wynd. A black father and his young schoolgirl daughter play on the sofa; arty monochrome wallpaper, stunning red painted walls, stylish wood floor. The kitchen is a wonderful shade of green, and in another photo the daughter sits at the table, schoolbag beside her, contemplating – what? She looks optimistic, full of life.

Downstairs in the foyer, youths gather. Hoodies, cigarettes, bikes. The fluorescent lights give them a threatening air – but are they? Can we judge them by their age and clothes? They live here like everyone else. In a later photo they stand outside in a line for the camera and in this portrait they are suddenly humanised; they are The Wynd's future just as much as the little girl upstairs.



The poster boy for this exhibition is an elderly man. Sitting on his sofa surrounded by medical equipment it is clear that he has had a tracheotomy. In the poster photo he looks serious, but a second image in the exhibition shows him laughing, perhaps at something Derek Anderson has said, or maybe just at life. You want to know his story; he looks fun. In one way it would have been good to read a little about all of the people in these engrossing portraits, but in another they are all the more moving for their lack of words, as we are left wondering about the residents of a diverse community and an iconic building.

Into The Wynd is showing at [Leith Library](#), 28-30 Ferry Road

until **Friday 12th September 2014** – so you only have this week to see it. The library is open 10am-8pm Monday to Wednesday, 10am-5pm Thursday-Friday.

Derek intends to continue with the project; as he says, it is a work in progress.